

THE epicenter

Proud of our Veterans,
Proud of America!

Employee Newsletter of the VA Palo Alto Health Care System • January/February 2005

VA Secretary Commends Staff and Veterans

After spending a couple of hours touring the hospital at Palo Alto in December meeting staff and veterans, Secretary Anthony J. Principi said simply, "I will do whatever I can to help you get a Fisher House. The need is paramount and these families have earned nothing less."

The Secretary traveled to San Francisco primarily to help set up a team to raise funds for a Fisher House for the Bay area. After a meeting in San Francisco to discuss the subject, he traveled to Palo Alto and met with Dr. Robert Wiebe, VISN 21 director,

Ms. Lisa Freeman, VAPAHCS director, and facility management about what he could do to help. He also gave an update on the budget and legislation.

At least three times during his visit, the Secretary referred to the Palo Alto Health Care System as a flagship health care system in VA. "There's no doubt about it, the nurses, doctors and thousands of clinical and support staff that keep this operation going are some of the world's - not just VA's - best."

The first stop on his tour was Medical Surgery ICU, where the Secretary was showed a new ICU

Computer Information System that has been successfully implemented here and at San Francisco and is in the process of being implemented in the other three hospitals in VISN 21. He saw a groundbreaking development as doctors and pharmacists used wireless laptops on rounds to view all patients' data from VISTA, Stentor and Picis, while going from bed to bed.

Following ICU, Secretary Principi visited the Hospice Unit, meeting patients and staff and finished in Building 7, where he met clinical

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Secretary Principi gets a first-hand lesson from Dr. Eran Geller, chief of ICU, on the hospital's new computer information system. Bernardette Arellano, from Congressman Mike Honda's office, watches along with Dr. Robert Wiebe, director of VISN 21.



Karen Blair receives a heart-felt thanks from Secretary Principi for her generous donation for a Fisher House at Palo Alto.

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A Word From Our Director



**Elizabeth Joyce Freeman, Director
VA Palo Alto Health Care System**

As we enter 2005, we can all continue to appreciate the importance of our mission and the importance of organizations whose mission is to serve others in their time of need and distress. We can take pride in mending the bodies and spirits of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and in the generous outpouring of supplies and aid to the earthquake and tidal wave victims in Asia. We can take pride in the recognition of the quality of VA care.

In December 2004, RAND, an independent think-tank, found that VA patients were significantly more likely than non-VA patients to receive needed preventative care. The study also found that VA patients with chronic medical problems received the treatment they needed more often than private-sector patients. Researchers examined the medical records of nearly 600 VA patients and about 1,000 non-VA patients with similar health problems. Then, researchers compared the treatment received by both groups to well-established standards for medical care for 26 conditions.

They found that about 51 percent of non-VA patients received care that met the latest standards of the health care profession, compared with 67 percent for VA patients. For preventative care, such as pneumonia vaccination and certain cancer screenings, 64 percent of VA patients received the appropriate care, compared to only 44 percent in the private sector. Researchers attributed the difference to technological innovations, such as VA's computerized patient records, and to policies holding top managers accountable for standards in preventative care and the treatment of long-term conditions.

Also in December 2004, the University of Michigan released its annual American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) for the federal

government. While the overall score for the federal government was 72.1 on ACSI's 100-point scale, VA scored 91 for customer satisfaction and 92 in veteran loyalty, meaning that nearly all veterans under VA care intend to continue using the VA and to speak positively about their experiences.

We face great challenges in 2005 to maintain the high standards we set for ourselves and for those we serve. Despite the enormous budget challenges we may face, we must never allow the quality of the care we provide to diminish. We are not alone in this struggle. We will continue to work together to find creative solutions to these difficult problems. We all have the same goal - serving the veteran. That goal will continue to motivate and energize us.

We face some difficult transitions in leadership in 2005. On the national level, Secretary Principi will be leaving the Department to face other challenges. His leadership and commitment to the veteran will be sorely missed. At the local level, we say goodbye to two key members of my staff who are retiring. Pat Allyn, Chief, Quality Management, and Joe Russo, Patient Advocate and former Chief of Medical Administration Service, have been key contributors to VAPAHCS for many years. We wish all the best to these remarkable individuals and outstanding performers in their retirement.

On a very sad note, over the Christmas holidays we learned of the sudden passing of Jeff Ross, our Chief of the VAPAHCS Canteen Service. Jeff served in the Army from 1964 through 1985 when he retired. He began working with the Veterans Canteen Service in 1999 and became Chief at VAPAHCS in 2000. He was well known throughout VAPAHCS for his dedication and willingness to accommodate any request for assistance. He worked ceaselessly in service to his fellow veterans.

Although we face many uncertainties in 2005, we have one constant - the commitment of our staff to the mission of providing world-class quality health care for veterans. I appreciate all of your hard work in 2004 and look forward to working with all of you in 2005.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth J. Freeman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "J" and "F".

**Elizabeth Joyce Freeman
Director**

Graduates Learn Much from the Emerging Leaders Development Program



Cart Campbell

The ELDP is a core component of VHA's succession planning and workforce development initiatives. Our local program graduates completed a rigorous academic program that included attending onsite and off-site workshops with ELDP participants from VA Medical Center, San Francisco. They were also required to complete a series of independent learning assignments and give a formal presentation to their peers, in addition to undertaking a service-level customer service project. Their shared experiences and knowledge gained during the ELDP will serve our graduates well in their respective leadership paths.

Congratulations to the graduates of VAPAHCS' Emerging Leaders Development Program (ELDP) Class of 2004. Above are: (seated left to right): Vanita Westbrook, Herlita Ayap, Ken Randall, Ann Narciso, Kim Monlux, Jesse Ortega, Brian Higgins and Carly Cortese. (Standing): Vivian Miller, Alisa Krinsky, Harley Barber, Nelson Spaulding, Lisa Freeman (Director), George Taylor, John Sisty (Associate Director), Jackie Bevins (ELDP Program Coordinator), Andy Duprey, Susan Feighery, Jean Gurga, Chris Roberts, Deborah Holden-Grogan, Gilbert Simpson, and Ray Tanjoco.

Simulation Center Keeps Moving Forward

There is little likelihood that anyone alive today will drive a flying car or live in a city on the moon, but some ideas that might seem more at home in an episode of "Star Trek" are closer to coming true than we might imagine.

One such idea is the "holodeck," a simulated reality so fabulous that it can trick someone into believing it is real. Due to the efforts of Dr. David Gaba and the VA Palo Alto Simulation Center, working together with the Center for Advanced Pediatric Education, the Center for Simulation in Medicine, and the Stanford University Department of Medical Media and Information Technologies, simulation-based learning is an emerging and important technology.

Dr. Gaba and innovative researchers at VA Palo Alto and Stanford have been developing this technology for almost 20 years. Immersive simulations allow medical practitioners to train in circumstances real enough to lure them into suspending disbelief and acting and speaking as they do in their real jobs. The simulation initiative conducted an introductory seminar and demonstration in November at Stanford. The initiative plans to establish a Center for Immersive and Simulation-based learning in 2005.



Dr. Gaba

After 62 Years

Couple Renews Their Vows

June Phinney not only visited her husband Marion, a patient on 4C, on their 62nd wedding anniversary last month, she brought family, VA medical staff and Chaplain William Schooler. The couple then celebrated their anniversary with a Renewal of Marriage Vows.

Even though Mrs. Phinney said, "I was so nervous about the service I wasn't sure I could last through it," their original vows were given in more chaotic circumstances. The Phinneys were married at noon, December 3, 1942, by an Army Chaplain at Ft. Lewis, Washington. Half an hour later-almost the briefest of possible honeymoons-Marion Phinney was off to the South Pacific and the war against Japan. He would not return until November of 1945. Marion Phinney retired from the Army after 24 years of service to his country.

Marion and June Phinney reminded each other what 62 years of marriage has meant to them both - "It's been a blessing!" said Mrs. Phinney. "Fact is, we fit together like a pair of old shoes." The Phinneys also expressed their gratitude and appreciation for the treatment they have received at the Palo Alto VA Hospital.



Chuck Revell

PET-CT Provides the Best in Diagnostic Technology ... *Ask Waldo!*

Dr. Segall asked me to call him George right before he asked Colleen Wong, radiology assistant chief technologist, and Julie Loero, nuclear medicine chief technologist, in the mobile PET/CT scan unit working every Friday at the VAPAHCS, to show me how the unit worked and to turn it up-when I was inside-to 400 degrees.

He was kidding, of course, and it was a friendly gesture (the George part), but the mobile PET/CT scan unit parked behind the hospital each Friday is no less miraculous for the personability of Dr. Segall and his almost partners in almost scientific crime. They are not kidding about what the mobile PET/CT unit represents for veterans.

PET/CT imaging technology is a dramatic and significant improvement in diagnostic technology for diseases like cancer, arteriosclerosis and Alzheimer's, and the VAPAHCS has been among the leaders in providing access to this emerging technology in Northern California since 1991.

Since I am old enough to remember standing on the flouroscope at the Red Goose shoe store to look down at the bones in my feet even when they were inside my shoes, I need to explain, inasmuch as possible, what this new technology actually does. I owe this explanation to Dr. Segall, chief of nuclear medicine and acting chief of radiology.

First of all, PET stands for Positron Emission Tomography. I knew emission; I had to ask about positrons and tomography. Positrons, it turns out, are anti-matter, and anti-matter, it turns out, is not some

kind of science fiction idea. Anti-matter is real, so real that actual anti-matter particles are being manufactured every day right here on the grounds of the Palo Alto facility. I'll get to the cyclotron and the robot arms and the lead-lined containers in a bit, but believe me-anti-matter exists. For a second. Or for one billionth of a second. That's the secret of this PET anti-matter: it's looking for a special kind of matter, and it finds it faster than I can find my glasses when I wake up in the morning. The positron (an anti-electron, for you physics aficionados) finds an electron, and then they annihilate each other. Pow. And as they go, they create a signature packet of energy that Dr. Segall can see when he looks at the PET scan.

But that's not all. It gets better. Dr. Segall's ability to explain arcane new technology and nuclear medicine to an interested guy with a notepad is astonishing, especially since he uses an analogy to "Where's Waldo." You know about Waldo. He's that guy in the red and white striped shirt nobody can find in the crowd scene. PET scans can find Waldo. Dr. Segall showed me. Waldo exists where the positron and the electron annihilate each other with a red pow: Waldo!

What that means is not clear until I explain the CT part. That's what many of us remember as a CAT scan; the CT scan provides a three-dimensional map of the body (a tomograph) that allows a doctor to, essentially, find Waldo's exact location. So the positrons prove Waldo exists and the CT scan tells us where he is. And that's a great thing when we're talking about cancer cells or brain cells beginning to show signs of Parkinson's disease or Alzheimer's. Even more miraculously,

PET-CT technology can discover these diseases before they actually begin to create visible disease; they can show cells beginning to malfunction by displaying their altered metabolisms. As Dr. Segall says, inasmuch as some cancers have 100% rates of cure if they are discovered early enough, PET-CT technology allows us to find them at the onset of illness. Pow!

Nuclear medicine technologist Julie Loero prepares a veteran for a PET-CT scan, while radiology technologist Colleen Wong sets up the computer to acquire the pictures.



Cart Campbell

What does this half-hour procedure mean to veterans? The news, even if it is bad, is often good. The most amazing thing about PET-CT scans is that they can often help a patient avoid intrusive medical necessities like biopsies. The technology helps physicians determine which spots need to be looked at more closely and which spots are probably benign.

Similarly, elderly people often experience memory loss. Is this simply a process of aging or is this Alzheimer's disease-which happens, by the way, to be fatal? A PET-CT scan can determine the nature of the patient's brain and make a more specific diagnosis than has ever been possible before.

VAPAHCS employed the first PET scanner in Northern California in 1991 (for veterans and non-veteran members of the region); and the existing PET scanner was installed 1995. This scanner seems sort of pathetic now and that's why we now have a state-of-the-art mobile unit, parked here every Friday.

The Palo Alto VA Hospital has two important partners in providing this care to local veterans, NCPIC (Northern California PET Imaging Center-owner of the mobile unit) and PETNet. PETNet operates a nuclear chemistry lab on site that manufactures the isotopes used here and elsewhere. Dr. Segall's nuclear medicine team and partners are working hard to provide the marvel of modern medicine to veterans.

By **Allan Johnson**, VAPAHCS Volunteer



Dr. Carina Mari Aparici and Dr. George Segall review a veteran's recent PET-CT scan. This new technology helps physicians determine which spots need to be looked at more closely and which spots are probably benign. A PET-CT scan can determine the health of the patient's brain and make a more specific diagnosis than has ever been possible before.

Start the New Year Off Right

Visit an Employee Fitness Facility



Recreation therapist Alisa Krinsky demonstrates the proper form on state-of-the-art exercise equipment.

Why do most of our New Year resolutions fail? We have competing commitments and our overbooked lives and strong immunity to change can keep us from relearning deeply ingrained habits.

How can I create a positive change this New Year? To make New Year resolutions real takes personal determination, practice, repetition and the support of others. It takes approximately 30 days to create a new habit. Ask a co-worker to exercise with you twice a week for 20 minutes.

What Facilities are Available for VAPAHCS Employees? Fitness rooms are available to employees at each site with state-of-the-art exercise equipment and are open to all employees. For access code to fitness centers, contact your service chief. Recreation therapy service created employee and volunteer hours in all of the recreation facilities at the various sites, to give people the opportunity to have an optimal choice in creating a well-balanced fitness/wellness program. Please see the new Employee Fitness & Wellness Facilities Brochure or visit VAPAWEB "Health and Wellness" listed under "Employee Services" for more information.

YOU'RE INVITED

VA patients, families, staff
and the general public

Colon Cancer Day Conference

Monday, March 21, 2005
9:30am-2:00pm
PAD, Auditorium

Did you know that colon cancer is the third most common cancer? Come hear about what colon cancer is; screening; treatment overview; actual patient experiences and more.

Conference faculty:

Harlan Pinto, MD; Sherry Wren, MD;
Beth Martin, MD; Kristen Ganjoo, MD;
Roy Soetikno, MD; Bassem Safadi, MD;
Matthew Cordova, PhD;
American Cancer Society

Contact:

Sheryl Stanger, Cancer Registrar
Ext. 35481

EMPLOYEE NEWS (JANUARY)

New Employees

Anesthesiology Svc.
Troy D. Almeida
Eric Michael Blake
Charles P. Coble

Blind Rehab Svc.
John C Wood

Business Office
Valdez C. Casis

Canteen Svc.
Miscel L. Vansyckle

Environmental Mgmt. Svc.
Gary L. Roe

Medical Svc.
Sunitha M. Gill

Nursing Svc.
Rochelle M. Barbiran
Nequitha M. Busby
Sebastian W. Dzekashu
Pesio M. Liufau
Angelica Lopez
Sherri L. Monahan
Barbara Vasilow Rathbun
Jacqueline D. Riley
Gertrude C. Ward

Pharmacy Svc.
Vicky C. Huang

Police & Security Svc.
Gabriel M. Gonzalez

Radiology Svc.
Curt A. Arbtin
Perry M. Fernandez

Readjustment Counseling
Lance A. Frederick

Research Svc.
Abigail M. Andrade

Social Work Svc.
Gene E. Levy
Stephen J. Rogers
Ann M. Walker

Surgery Svc.
Susan Diana Crowe

Retirees

Patricia Adams (14)
Director's Office

Anna Ferrulli (22)
Nursing Svc.

Harry Greenberg (30)
Medical Svc.

Sol Iverson (11)
Nursing Svc.

Joyce Snyder (25)
Nursing Svc.

Mark Zemke (22)
Blind Rehab. Svc.

(Years of service are indicated in parentheses.)

Employee Service Awards

10 Years

Andrew Freedman
Nursing Svc.

Celeste Dangca
Nursing Svc.

Lito Saturno
Pathology & Lab. Svc.

David Seegers
Surgical Svc.

David Van Syckle
Radiology Svc.

Anthony Wallace
IRMS

15 Years

Angela Coon
Director's Office

Cher Gianninoto
Social Work Svc.

Joan McFadden
Nursing Svc.

Ivory Witherspoon
Anesthesiology Svc.

20 Years

Tony Adams
A&MMS
George Bennett
Prosthetics & Sensory Aids

Gloria Galavez
Social Work Svc.

Allen Hayes
Nursing Svc.

Mary Thomas
Nursing Svc.

Bruce Young
Social Work Svc.

25 Years

Mattie Nelson
Nursing Svc.

Usha Parashar
Nursing Svc.

Jean Parsons
Director's Office

Linda Welch-Reynolds
Nursing Svc.

30 years

Peggy Allyn
Environmental Mgmt. Svc.

Peter Gilmore
Engineering Svc.

35 Years

Miller Henderson
Nursing Svc.

Rogelio Ramirez
Human Resources Svc.

John Supra
Chief of Staff's Office

40 Years

George Mitchell
Medical Svc.

EMPLOYEE NEWS (FEBRUARY)

New Employees

A&MMS
Christopher L. Cornell

Canteen Svc.
Johathan M. Fagman

Chief of Staff
Paula Lynn Wilbourne

Dental Svc.
Crispin I. Leano

Medical Svc.
Gordon G. Gao
Harry B. Greenberg
Madeline Tam

Nursing Svc.
Julieta M. Arce
Jocelyn Lao Bella

Helen M. Danso
James M. Deusterman
Eden B. Donato
Marissa A. Masangcay
Marvee McLendon
Dorothy H. Ngaw
Conniesue Redman
Juliana Wu

Nutrition & Food Svc.
Roshan P. Luke

Pharmacy Svc.
Sharnila D. Bali
Thao N. Trinh

Social Work Svc.
Cesz Manalo
Paul D. Stone

Retirees

Mira Adams (26)
Director's Office

Estela Bonifacio (35)
Nursing Svc.

Wilma Brisendine (22)
Radiology Svc.

Aleice Briston (14)
Human Resources Svc.

Virginia DeGuzman (25)
Voluntary Svc.

Marilyn Erickson (8)
Recreation Svc.

Dagmar Gallagher (21)
Radiology Svc.

Silvia Hernandez (25)
Nursing Svc.

Freddie Jackson (30)
Nursing Svc.

Lillian Walter (27)
Nursing Svc.

John Witt (17)
Engineering Svc.

(Years of service are indicated in parentheses.)

Employee Service Awards

15 Years

Diane Cave
Nursing Svc.

Julie Harper
Nursing Svc.

Ronald Hill
Recreation Therapy

Maria Lopez
Pathology & Lab. Svc.

Gary Mason
Environmental Mgmt. Svc.

Glorina Palugod
Pharmacy Svc.

Ronda Robinson
Prosthetics & Sensory Aids

Luckana Roecher
Nursing Svc.

Rosario Rozul
Dermatology Svc.

Parmindra Singh
Nursing Svc.

Lisa Tocci
Nursing Svc.

Elaine Weighill
Nursing Svc.

Rose Wilkins
Nursing Svc.

Dale Williams
Nutrition & Food Svc.

Debra Wyche-Jenkins
Nutrition & Food Svc.

Xerxes Zapata
Engineering Svc.

20 Years

Linda Boxer
Medical Svc.

Anne Charnley
Nursing Svc.

Nieva Dionisio
Nursing Svc.

Clara Elaco
Nursing Svc.

Donald Gintel
A&MMS

Peter Hernandez
Environmental Mgmt. Svc.

Carmelo Hornilla
Engineering Svc.

William Turk
Radiology Svc.

John Witt
Engineering Svc.

25 Years

Eula Cobb
Nursing Svc.

Eileen Donaldson
Nursing Svc.

Renee Kawahara
Physical Medicine & Rehab.

Theresa Lee-Johns
Nursing Svc.

Delbert Lewis
Engineering Svc.

Sherry Riney
Social Work Svc.

30 Years

Robin Dixon
A&MMS

35 Years

Donna Buckley
Surgical Svc.

Wiltie Celestine
Nursing Svc.

Emma Rimando
Nursing Svc.

New Specialist to the Chief of Staff



Beth Hardison started her career at Portsmouth Naval Hospital in Virginia, in 1992, as a recreation therapist. In 1994, she accepted a position at VAPAHCS working in acute psychiatry. Her 10-year career path in rec therapy included inpatient psychiatry, community mental health, aquatic therapy/fitness, acting chief and finally as supervisor.

A recreation therapist graduate of East Carolina University, Beth also is a graduate of the VA Management Development Program (2001) and the Leadership Development Institute (2004). Beth recently was selected as the Health System Specialist to the Chief of Staff and is working on special projects and duties supporting this office. With her partner she enjoys working on their “tool time” home in the Santa Cruz Mountains, playing volleyball and walking with Sadie, the dog.

Kelly Robertson is the New Chief of Pharmacy

Kelly Robertson, Pharm. D., started at VAPAHCS as Chief Resident in 1992 after completing her doctorate of pharmacy at University of the Pacific, School of Pharmacy.

Over the past 12 years, Kelly has taken on challenging administrative, managerial and leadership roles and has demonstrated a positive career track of progression with a clear commitment to her work.

She is a creative, self-motivated, innovative leader who champions and strengthens the VA Palo Alto Health Care System Pharmacy Service. We are fortunate to have Dr. Robertson on board and we congratulate her on her new position.



Joni Drobick Takes Over as New Patient Advocate



Our new patient advocate, Joni Drobick, began her VA career in 1989 as a nurse manager in Extended Care Service. Her responsibilities included management of the secured dementia unit and both the open and locked gero-psych units. In 2000, Joni moved to a position in Quality Management and has worked with numerous programs on JCAHO preparation, performance measure accountability and program development. She has served as a member of the Nurse Professional Standards Board for many years and currently is the chairperson. Joni is active in NOVA as membership chairperson. She volunteers for SAVE, (Shelter Against Violent Environments) on their crisis hotline. She credits her happiness with life to her husband of 33 years, three grown children and a 6-year-old granddaughter.

Joni received her bachelor's degree in Nursing from Northern Illinois University and her master's in Public Administration, Health Science, from the University of San Francisco. Joni describes herself as a “people” person and is looking forward to working with veterans and staff in her new role.



Staff and veterans of the Community Transition Center (CTC), Menlo Park Division.

CTC Is a Bridge Back to Life

Just as spinal rehabilitation specialty services offer injured veterans new opportunities to live full and meaningful lives, VAPAHCS Community Transitions Center (CTC) is charting new territory in the treatment of veterans with serious mental illness. CTC is one of the leaders in recovery-oriented services for veterans in the nation.

They speak for themselves in the classroom as social worker Joyce Bell, CTC Coordinator, and nurse Janet Vassar listen attentively. "Simply stated, if it wasn't for this program, I don't think I'd be alive," said Army veteran Dwain Frisbee. His work with his advisors and teachers in CTC has allowed him to take risks and become a role model for his fellow students.

"Much of this new program centers around attitude, which is reflected in the terms we use," said Bell. "We are teachers and advisors; the veterans are students. The key to CTC's success can be found in our core values. We believe that recovery from psychiatric disabilities is possible. We believe that personal choice is a right and a responsibility. We believe that supported risk taking is necessary, and we believe that boundaries need to be flexible."

Opened in July 1998, CTC has transformed VA treatment of severe mental illness from a paternal and institutional model that served to protect veterans to one where recovery and reintegration into the community is the ultimate goal. Primary in this process is CTC's open door; veterans themselves make the choice to come or go.

Bell, the only full time staff, directs a team of caregivers that includes Janet Vassar, RN; Helen Ostruske, LCSW; Mary English, MSN; Eric Young, RT; and Bob Whelan LSW. They divide their busy days between the Center and other job responsibilities for VAPAHCS, including hosting CTC at the San Jose clinic two days a week. Additionally, Bell, Ostruske and Vassar earned their certification as Psychiatric Rehabilitation Practitioners from the U.S. Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services.

For veterans with psychotic illnesses like schizophrenia, CTC is a place to talk and grow and experience the "passages" that CTC offers each individual: from resignation to hope, from alienation to meaning, from isolation to connections and relationships, and, perhaps best of all, from an identity as a mental patient to an identity beyond or in spite of a psychiatric disorder. At CTC, veterans aren't patients receiving treatment, they're students who are learning.

Army veteran Ron Van Alphen has been to college as a result of CTC's efforts to serve as a bridge to the community. "At first," he says, "I was skeptical about meeting people, but the staff here helped me. They allow us to think and add whatever it is that we have. There's a lot of respect here. We organized a trip to Santa Cruz. We did it. It had been years since I'd really been out. I resisted, but the staff suggested I go, and I did, and I had a great time."

Dr. Tina Lee, director of Outpatient Mental Health, says VA caregivers for the seriously mentally ill have to answer an important question: "Do we want these veterans here all the time or out living and contributing in the community?" CTC is, for many veterans, a vital bridge that leads them back to the world.

"We are teachers and advisors: the veterans are students," explains Social Worker Joyce Bell, CTC coordinator.



Chuck Revell

Employee to Employee

Chaplain Jackson Touches Lives

When a veteran dies, a very special team of VAPAHCS employees comes to the aid of families. One of those employees is Victoria Layton, patient service assistant for decedent affairs. But this isn't about Victoria. It's a heart-felt story written by her about another key member of the decedent affairs team.

"Chaplain Virginia Jackson has continuously established strong and lasting relationships with veterans and their families, adding a spiritual base that a lot of our families require, especially when a loved one dies. Virginia's compassionate expressions of generosity and love for the

lives she has touched reach beyond their grief and bring peace.

The VAPAHCS Chaplain Service is a critical part of the system allowing Chaplains the ability to work diligently with families. Chaplain Jackson has a humble spirit. She has made families understand what it means to give the gift of life, what it means to receive it, and how important it is to share and make end-of-life decisions. She speaks with the voice of experience and wisdom. Virginia inspires a spirit of personal and spiritual renewal with each family she encounters. Through her special talents, she has established an impressive reputation for assisting veterans' families with both easy and practical methods of managing their grief.

I want to pay special homage to a phenomenal woman whom I have the utmost respect for and the privilege to work with: Chaplain Jackson. Always keep your same spirit. You have been a mentor as well as an inspiration to many."

Photos by Steve George, Veteran

By **Victoria Layton**, Patient Service Assistant



Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) Gains Momentum in the 11th Hour

In this uncertain time of the dot-com collapse and continuing budget cuts - particularly with double-income households devastated by job losses - VAPAHCS employees pulled off another successful fundraising drive under the 2004 CFC. Remarkably, donations surpassed last year's collections by almost \$2,500. Employees gave generously, raising a total of \$135,435 in charitable contributions.

The VAPAHCS fell under four campaign coverage areas: Santa Clara/San Benito Counties, Monterey/Santa Cruz Counties, Central Valley/Sierra, and the Greater San Francisco Bay Area. A snapshot of collections by service area is provided below:

The number of givers this year is 868 (compared to 888 last year), comprising 23.32 percent of our employee population of over 3,700. The average gift was \$155.34, up from \$127.00 in 2003.

Our total contributions to CFC could not have been possible without the extraordinary efforts of designated key workers within each service. Most importantly, it was the dedicated and caring leadership of Lea Namba, who volunteered to chair our CFC efforts. Special thanks go out to Lea and the more than 100 personnel who were charged with the sometimes difficult task of soliciting donations from fellow co-workers.

Coverage Areas	Amount Pledged	Number of Donors
Santa Clara/San Benito Counties	\$101,470.90	631
Monterey/Santa Cruz Counties	5,549.00	30
Central Valley/Sierra	3,353.00	25
Greater San Francisco Bay Area	24,461.12	182
Total VAPAHCS Contributions	\$134,834.02	868

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VA Secretary Meets VAPAHCS Staff and Veterans



personnel and patients from the spinal cord and traumatic brain injury units.

The Secretary was obviously touched when meeting our youngest patients from Iraq. "I used to think we had the best soldiers, Marines and sailors during Vietnam," he said. "I'm not so sure now. I look at these remarkably brave and courageous men here today, and I am as impressed as I have ever been with our fighting forces."

He was equally impressed with the VA Palo Alto staff. "The men and women who care for these veterans every day are nothing short of superb," he said. He shook hands and took pictures as long as people wanted him and through it all was warm, cordial and appreciative of the sacrifices of our veterans and our staff.

Two days later, the Secretary announced his resignation and there was sadness among our staff. "I am humbled to have worked side by side with you, the men and women who bring VA to life, as you demonstrated every day an all encompassing commitment to our mission and documented your skills in the changed lives of the veterans we serve," Secretary Principi wrote.

We wish the Secretary the best, but in his final words during the visit he said, "You haven't seen the last of me. I will be back for the Fisher House groundbreaking very soon."



Photos top to bottom: The Secretary was touched when meeting Marine Lance Corporal Raymond Warren during his visit to the traumatic brain injury unit, where he also met Corporal Henry Maldonado and his mother and uncle. During his visit to the Hospice unit, the Secretary met Unit Secretary Jill Strigel, LVN, and one of the veteran's wives, Mrs. Joan Hobbs (bottom left). The visit also afforded the Secretary a chance to meet veterans on ICU, where he spent time visiting and brightening their day.



Photos by Curt Campbell

You Make a Difference!

Submitted by our veterans and their families

Dear Mrs. Freeman:

I was recently a patient in the Palo Alto Health Care System. I was admitted on September 15, 2004 to the Spinal Cord Injury unit and was discharged on October 6, 2004. I am writing to extend my thanks and praise to the entire VAPA Health Care System. The entire system working together made my recent experience worth commending. Good communication was inherent throughout my stay.

SCI Outpatient Clinic

Doug Ota, M.D., Linda Love, R.N., Inder Perkash, M.D. and Vickie Wolfe, R.N., were all instrumental in offering their invaluable expertise and advice to aid me in my decision to schedule a laparoscopic colostomy. I was able to make it through the "I thought I was gonna die" phase of my condition because of their continuing efforts.



SCI Inpatient Ward

I also want to thank **M. Punj, M.D., Sandi MacDonald, R.N.,** Nurse Manager, and the entire SCI nursing staff. (I hesitate to praise individuals for fear I may forget someone.) So let me say every contact that I had with the nursing staff and Dr. Punj was great. The staff was professional and courteous at all times.

General Surgery Department and Operating Room Staff

The Pre-Op and Post-Op care that I received was thorough and very efficiently performed. The Pre-

Op General Surgery Clinic Appointment on 9/16/4 was most eventful. My wife and I met with **Bassem Safadi, M.D.,** Staff Surgeon, a couple of the resident doctors and **Nina Bellatorre, R.N., M.S.** All of our questions and concerns were addressed in an efficient and informative manner. My surgery time was performed successfully as scheduled on 9/22/4. My thanks to Dr. Safadi, **Melanie Ott, R.N.,** and the entire OR Staff. Nina Bellatorre, R.N., M.S. and **Karen Blair, R.N., M.S.,** met with me several times after the surgery to ensure that I was healing properly and had all of the supplies I needed to go home.

Hometel

My thanks are also extended to **Hank Gambina, LCSW,** for making arrangements for my wife to stay at "Hometel." **Lori Birch, LCSW,** and the Hometel staff do the best they can to accommodate wives during the week. Mary-Pat and I appreciated the opportunity to participate in that program and are grateful that it exists.

Overall Summary

Our confidence level of a successful outcome was high at all times.

Sincerely,

Edward F. Comerford, U.S. Army, Retired



*** Compliments of Gilda Radner, a.k.a. "Roseanne Roseannadanna," Saturday Night Live ~ 1970s*

THE
epicenter

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We welcome any comments,
suggestions or story ideas
you may have; please contact
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